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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000410

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONWIDE STRIKE BRINGS SCATTERED VIOLENCE,
INSURGENTS ATTACK REMOTE POLICE POST

REFS: A) KATHMANDU 380, B) 01 KATHMANDU 2388

1. (SBU) Summary. Insurgents attacked a remote police post in Salyan district, killing 34 policemen, on the eve of a strike called by the Maoists for February 22 and 23. Scattered bombings were reported throughout the country in the run-up to the strike, including a fatal incident along a major road in Kathmandu early on February 22. As the strike began, businesses remained closed and transportation throughout the country came to a halt. Although the government has public sentiment on its side in the struggle against the Maoists, a worsening resource crunch prevents an effective response to the insurgency's guerrilla tactics. Suggested press guidance follows paragraph 6. End Summary.

On Eve of Strike, Maoists Attack Police...

2. (SBU) Maoist insurgents called a nationwide strike for February 22 and 23, the first such attempted action since December 7 (Ref B). In contrast to the uneventful December action, the number of bombings and violent attacks reported throughout the country have increased in the run-up to the February strike. At 11:00 p.m. February 21, Maoists launched an attack on a remote police post in Sitalpati, Salyan District, approximately 300 miles west of Kathmandu. According to Salyan's Chief District Officer (CDO), 34 of the 80 police officers stationed at the post were killed in the hour-and-a-half long siege. An undetermined number of insurgents were also killed, their bodies taken away by their comrades. The CDO also reported that groups of Maoists had gathered on the outskirts of the district capital, intending to attack it, but had fled at the sight of two army helicopters dispatched to the area.

And Scatter Bombs

3. (SBU) On the morning of February 21 security forces shot and killed a Maoist insurgent who was attempting to hang a "banner bomb" on a pole in the capital. During the day at least five other bombs went off around the Kathmandu Valley and a car belonging to an army pilot was firebombed. In other areas of Nepal scattered incidents of violence were also reported, including the firebombing of a long-distance bus in Chitwan District that took the lives of five passengers.

4. (SBU) A few minutes past nine on the morning of February 22 a bomb went off in a garbage pile near a telecommunications office in the Chabahil neighborhood of Kathmandu. Police confirmed that one woman, a garbage collector, was killed. Minutes later a second bomb reportedly went off in the same location.

Maoist Threat Closes Nepal

5. (SBU) Shops on the capital's main streets stayed closed February 22 and most public conveyances remained garaged. Armed police and military personnel were out in force. A few private motorists ventured out, their license plates obscured behind plain white paper. In Thamel, the tourist district, travelers waited in vain for taxicabs or wandered aimlessly among the shuttered storefronts as soldiers passed by in jeeps mounted with machine guns. One major hotel seized on the lack of traffic to scrub down its empty parking lot. Sources in small cities throughout Nepal's plains and hill districts reported similar conditions, with few shop owners daring to open for trade and most motorized vehicles sitting idle. The head of a local beverage concern reported that earlier in the week truck drivers had refused to make long-distance hauls for fear of the impending strike.

Comment

6. (SBU) The violence leading up to the nationwide strike came while the Parliament debated on and then extended the state of emergency for another three months (Septel), and

no doubt strengthened the hand of those who wanted the extension. The Maoists will not make any new converts by threatening more violence and strangling Nepal's already lagging economy - most Nepalis expressed frustration mixed with anger when asked about the effects of the strike. The recent brutal attacks in Achham District (Ref A) have instilled a very real sense of fear among ordinary Nepalis, even here in the Kathmandu Valley. Although the government now has a mandate to continue the emergency, the increasing strain on the state's resources means it will continue to have difficulty countering the insurgents' guerrilla campaign.

Suggested Press Guidance

17. Begin Suggested Press Guidance:

The Government of the United States denounces the acts of violence and terror perpetrated by Maoist insurgents in the run-up to the national strike called for February 22 and 23, including the attack in Salyan District during the night of February 21 that took the lives of 34 police officers. A series of explosions in and around Kathmandu have resulted in at least one death. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims of this senseless bloodshed.

Strikes or "bandhs" such as the one called by the Maoists for February 22 and 23 are enforced by the threat of violence. We reiterate our support for the right of the Government of Nepal to safeguard its citizens, as provided for under the Constitution. In a democracy there is no room to achieve political objectives through violence.

Once more we urge the Maoists to lay down their arms immediately and to engage in the peaceful pursuit of their aims within the democratic framework of Nepal's Constitution.

End Suggested Press Guidance.

MALINOWSKI